The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution

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Prof. Pickup: I'm reminded of a statement Hitler made in a Munich courtroom: "If I stand here today as a revolutionary, it's as a revolutionary against the revolution." (I. Silone, The School for Dictators)

ON February 19, 1934, Chiang Kai-shek inaugurated the New Life Movement in Nanchang, Kiangsi, with the express goal of "revolutionizing" Chinese life. The Kuomintang leadership, holding the material and spiritual "degeneration" of the people responsible for China's continued crisis, decided at this time to launch a movement for hygienic and behavioral reform to revitalize the country. The movement was to signal the start of a new phase of Chinese history, one that was to be both conserving and revolutionary in spirit. It would achieve the most fundamental goals of the Chinese revolution without sacrificing native traditions. Nevertheless, the stress on the revival of native morality was the most striking aspect of the movement with its historical context, and endowed it with an aura of conservatism that overshadowed its revolutionary claims and has dominated its image since then. This image is somewhat misleading in its implication that the New Life Movement was the expression of a traditionalist upsurge in the Kuomintang during the Nanking Decade (1928-1937). The present study attempts a close analysis of New Life ideology—used here in the sense of a world view that underlay conceptions of politics and society—to demonstrate that the conservatism and the revolutionary claims of the New Life Movement must be taken equally seriously. The movement was conservative, but conservative in a very specific sense: far from being a reaffirmation of traditional Chinese political conceptions, it was fashioned by and in response to the twentieth-century Chinese revolution. Its underlying spirit had greater affinity with modern counterrevolutionary movements than with political attitudes inherited from China's past. It was, in short, not a traditional but a modern response to a modern problem.

On the surface, the New Life Movement was remarkable for the absurdly exaggerated anticipations of its proponents, who held the serious—if self-serving—conviction that the key to China's national salvation lay in hygienic activities to purge the unhealthy habits of body and mind of the Chinese people. The movement was the Kuomintang version of a "cultural revolution" for China. As its leaders envisaged it, it was to be comparable in scope to the latter-day Cultural Revolution. It consisted essentially of campaigns to mobilize the population to improve public and

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private hygienic and behavioral standards. Such reform was expected to lead to the moral regeneration of the Chinese people and to enhance public awareness of and concern for China's problems, making the population more responsive to the needs of the nation and the policies of the state. The movement would not only strengthen the polity at a time of crisis, it would also lay the groundwork for a national “renaissance.” That is, the improvement of life was but the means to much more significant ends. The movement was to be to China what the New Deal was to the United States, Bolshevism to Russia, Fascism to Italy, National Socialism to Germany, and Kemalism to Turkey.¹ It was also considered more crucial and profound than those movements. As China's very existence was in question, reform was a matter of "life and death."² Its ideologues took the movement to be more fundamental than any previous movements anywhere, aiming as it did at “rebuilding and rejuvenating a country from its very foundations.”³ The latter signified starting from the simplest, the most basic aspects of life and proceeding to more complex problems, until the total transformation of society was achieved. In the light of the movement's fate, one tends to suspect that its original appeal was due more to the promise of social transformation than to the prosaic vision of cleaner lives. As the movement progressed, however, the means supplanted the ends; and what were to be “the initial stages were repeated over and over again without any improvement.”⁴ The leadership, faced with the failure of its initial campaigns, refused to turn to deeper underlying issues and instead became even more adamant, if ineffective, in defending its methods.

The combination of the movement's ultimate failure, its inability to evolve a systematic ideology, and the seeming banality of its concerns has led critical Chinese and foreign commentators to ignore the significance of New Life ideology and intentions and to stress the more superficial aspects of the movement. As a result, the movement has been approached variously as a joke or, for those taking it seriously, as a shallow and anachronistic throwback to Chinese tradition at a time when that tradition had already proven incapable of coping with China's problems. In the process, the revolutionary claims of the movement have all but disappeared from sight. While the movement has been recognized loosely as “conservative,” even if only as a “distorted echo” of genuine Confucian conservatism, its revolutionary claims have been dismissed offhand on the grounds that both in the practice of the movement and in the usage of its ideologues, revolution was transmuted into its "opposite sense."⁵

While these observations raise valid questions concerning the authenticity of the movement's revolutionary or conservative claims, they fail to explain the significance of its claims to be both—simultaneously. The contradictory claims of revolutionism and conservatism did not merely distort or cancel out one another;
they were synthesized into an ideology of counterrevolution. The New Life Move-
movement was indeed “conservative” in its glorification of native values and its opposition to social revolution; but it was also very contemporary, both in its insistence on popular “participation” in the political process and in the premium it placed on the transformation of values and institutions in accordance with changing historical circumstances. While the aims of the movement continued to be couched in tradi-
tional terminology, this terminology acquired a radically new meaning in its adaptation to contemporary political purpose and usage.

In the broader context of modern Chinese history, the New Life Movement stands out as a response to the intellectual and social mobilization that dominated Chinese politics in the twenties. Student and labor movements in the cities, and peasant movements in the countryside, represented the emergence of new social forces onto the political scene. These forces in turn reflected deeper, irreversible changes in Chinese society. The rise of a market economy lent a new significance to urban centers and their immediate environs. Urban labor emerged for the first time as an important political force. The cultural radicalism of the intelligentsia, crystallized around the Versailles Treaty issue in 1919, turned in the twenties into organized political action. The peasantry, while not as obviously affected at the time, was nevertheless increasingly released from its traditional moorings—due to a com-
bination of economic, political, and military factors. The political leaders of the twenties correctly perceived that political success depended on the extent to which these new forces could be incorporated into a new political structure. In spite of disagreements over the methods of accomplishing this goal, there was common agreement on the necessity of securing popular cooperation if the aims of national strength and progress were to be realized. When mass radicalism exceeded the bounds set by the Kuomintang, the party responded in the late twenties by outright suppression. Repression continued into the thirties, creating a general malaise in society and an apparent lack of concern for the national plight, most conspicuous in the case of the intelligentsia.6 The latter, not surprisingly, were the foremost target of New Life writers. The New Life Movement represented the Kuomintang effort to overcome public alienation from the government, to mobilize the public not only to support the state but also to help in its reform. Its basic intention was to substitute “political mobilization” for social mobilization, thus replacing revolution-
yory change from the bottom (which threatened the social structure) with closely supervised change orchestrated from the top (which would serve the goals of the state).7 The Kuomintang hoped to simultaneously eliminate social radicalism and convert the masses into instruments of its will.

The discussion below starts off with a brief description of the movement’s history and organization. One purpose is to familiarize the general reader with the outlines of the movement. More importantly, I believe that the movement’s methods reflected the leadership’s goal of “controlled popular mobilization” and shed light on its

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6 For an account of Kuomintang relations with the intelligentsia in this period, see John Israel, Student Nationalism in China, 1927—1937 (Stan-
ford: Hoover Institution, 1966). Students and youth were among the foremost concerns of the New Life Movement. For a number of views expressing con-
cern over the attitudes of youth at this time, see Pei Ching-hua (ed.), Hsin sheng-huo lun-t'ung (hereafter HSHLT) (Shanghai, 1936), Part II, 28—117.

7 A. F. K. Organski, “Fascism and Moderniza-
ideology, which is the main concern of this study. Due to the paucity of historical studies of the movement, there is little direct information available on its inner workings. The account below relies rather heavily on official sources. (See Bibliographical Note.) Though these sources exaggerated the movement's accomplishments and must be used with caution in assessing its impact on Chinese society, their distortions are something of an advantage in the present analysis, which stresses the expectations of the movement over its actual accomplishments.

The History and Fate of the New Life Movement

The New Life Movement consisted of two phases in its leadership and activities. Until 1936, the militaristic elements in the Kuomintang dominated the leadership: Chiang and military leaders close to him managed the movement through New Life Movement associations led by party and government personnel. From 1936 on, leadership seems to have shifted to Mme. Chiang and the more American, Christian-oriented elements in the Kuomintang. In this second phase, church and missionary organizations came to play important roles in the movement. The shift was formalized when the veteran missionary reformer George Shepherd was placed in charge of the movement in early 1936. The mobilization of the masses was most intense during the first two years of the movement's existence; the ideology discussed here was evolved during these years.

The process of origination of the New Life Movement remains to be extracted from Kuomintang documents and the biographies of party and military leaders. There were no doubt precedents for such a movement within modern Chinese history; but the immediate inspiration for the movement seems to have been the experience gained in the struggle against the Communists in Kiangsi. There is some evidence that in the course of their efforts to suppress the Kiangsi Soviet Republic, Kuomintang leaders came to appreciate the necessity of fighting the Communists with their own weapons—mobilizing the rural population on the government's side, much more positive attitude toward it after Shepherd's appointment. The May 1937 issue of the journal was practically devoted to the NLM, giving it enthusiastic endorsement. In it, Mme. Chiang noted a change in her husband's personal attitude toward the movement: "Since his return from Sian, the generalissimo has been giving more and more time to the development of character through the New Life Movement." Vol. 68, No. 5, p. 280.

8 For Mme. Chiang's increasing control, see Chu, "The New Life Movement," 9. Shepherd's activities in the New Life Movement are treated extensively in James C. Thomson, Jr., While China Faced West (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969). Contemporary observers noted the changes in the movement in 1936. An American diplomatic dispatch of 1937 noted the existence of a division at the upper levels of the leadership: "Thus the battle is drawn [within the NLM] between the Anglo-American Christian democrats and the German-Italian totalitarians." (Johnson to State, 21 May 1937. State Department 893.00/I4:127, enc. 2, pp. 12-13) [I am grateful to Prof. L. Eastman for calling my attention to this reference]. Chiang himself extended an invitation to Christian organizations (including the YMCA) to form New Life service groups and to promote the movement in their congregations in September 1936. Other evidence is provided by the Chinese Recorder, which initially paid little attention to the movement and was even critical of its militarism but adopted a

rather than relying exclusively on military force. The occasion for the inauguration of the New Life Movement was the anniversary of the expansion of Chiang’s campaign headquarters against the Kiangsi Soviet; its immediate aim was the rehabilitation of Kiangsi, ravaged by years of warfare and now on the verge of recapture by the government. Nevertheless, it was clear from the beginning that, in Chiang’s mind, the scope of the movement extended beyond that province. In his inaugural speech he expressed the hope to turn Kiangsi into a model province eventually to be emulated by the whole country. The basic principles that guided the movement in Kiangsi, therefore, represented no less than a blueprint for the transformation of the whole of Chinese society.

According to Kuomintang sources, Chiang’s call for a New Life, in February 1934, was followed by a swift mobilization of the population that exceeded his own expectations. Within a matter of weeks, the movement had spread “like wildfire” over most of China, encouraging some to believe that China’s long-promised “rebirth” was close at hand. From February 19 to March 26 Chiang delivered five speeches explaining the goals of the movement and its ideological basis. At the same time, the movement got under way in earnest with organizational activities and mass demonstrations. The first association for the promotion of New Life was established in Nanchang on February 21, to handle arrangements for the furtherance of the movement in that city and to spread it over the country. On March 11, the first public demonstration was held in the Public Athletic Ground at Nanchang. In spite of “drizzling rain,” the number of participants was estimated at one-hundred thousand, “twice” the number anticipated. This was followed by a lantern parade, on the evening of March 18, in which eighty-thousand people participated. The mass demonstrations publicized the goals of the movement by engaging in hygienic activities such as sweeping streets.

During March, the New Life Movement spilled out of Nanchang to all of Kiangsi province and other areas of China. On March 24, the Kiangsi New Life Promotion Association came into being on the initiative of the Headquarters of the Eastern Route Army for the Suppression of the Communist Bandits. The same month, the Central People’s Movement Committee issued a circular telegram addressed to people throughout China, pleading for their support for the movement that was “the only path for the salvation of the country.” Through March and April, New Life Promotional Associations were established in nine provinces as well as three municipal centers. By the first anniversary of the movement in February 1935, fifteen provinces, three municipalities, and nine railway centers had New Life organizations. As of the end of 1935, organization had reached nineteen provinces,


five municipalities, twelve railway centers, and ten overseas Chinese communities. At the lower administrative level, the organization had been extended to 1132 districts (hsien) by 1935.

The movement, in Kiangsi and elsewhere, proceeded in two phases: mass demonstrations for publicizing its aims, followed by more regular "leadership" and "inspection" by organized bodies and specially trained personnel to ensure that the public adhered to its goals. Throughout the first year, the stress was on public health and disciplined, orderly behavior. There were regional variations on specific items, but the general emphases were the same all over. A few of the reforms addressed deep-rooted social problems. These included the suppression of opium-smoking and gambling; the encouragement of reduced expenditures on weddings and funerals, which traditionally had imposed a financial burden, especially on the poor; and the drive to use native commodities. Even more important—but extremely spotty—were activities aimed at improving people's welfare, such as aid to peasants and river conservancy. These, however, were not among the movement's foremost goals and were largely restricted to Kiangsi province. The more basic concerns of the movement in action are expressed in the following statement, in which a Kuomintang spokesman recounts its "accomplishments" by 1936.

Public health programmes are being carried out. The orderly behavior of the people has aroused much favourable comment. There is no wandering or shuffling about the streets, no stopping in the middle of the road, no gaping about and no blocking, the traffic. The people abide by what is described as a one-side-of-the-street traffic; that is, they always keep to the left when walking about the streets. Smoking in the streets is considered undesirable and slovenly. Spitting in public places calls for a reprimand, not from the police but from the followers of the New Life Movement. Rudeness and vulgar manners have been, or are being eliminated.

Despite the efforts of the movement's propagandists to project an image of popular spontaneity, the New Life Movement was highly controlled from the beginning and was closely integrated with the Kuomintang and the military. The mass demonstrations were sponsored by the New Life organization through organized bodies such as schools and Boy Scouts. In the first public meeting in Nanchang on March 11, five-hundred organizations were supposed to have participated. Secondly, the leadership kept close tab on the minutest aspects of the movement—down to the style of women's dresses. Finally, the flourishing of New Life organizations throughout the country was not due to the spontaneous response of the

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15 Ibid., 200. MKESSNCNKHSHT gives information on personnel in eighteen provinces, four municipal centers, twelve railway centers, and ten overseas communities. See 553-576.
16 pao-ka-o, 114.
17 The leadership considered these goals achieved by the end of 1934 and expanded the goals of the movement to include "militarization, productivization, and aestheticization" for the second year. See pao-ka-o, 483-84.
18 See Chu, "The New Life Movement," 13, for some of these activities.
19 Chen, "The New Life Movement," 195. This piece, written for a foreign audience, exaggerates the achievements of the movement. The leadership itself expressed great disappointment in the movement in its addresses to native audiences. See below.
20 Ibid., 219. Chen describes the movement here as follows: "The New Life Movement is a movement of the people, for the people and by the people." Mme. Chiang was one of the major proponents of this view. See her "New Life Broadcast to U. S. A.," in General Chiang Kai-shek, op. cit., 84-86.
population as such but the initiative of provincial leaders. A brief review of the way in which these organizations came into being reveals that in every case where information was available to the authorities, it was party, government, and military officials in the provinces who took the lead in their establishment.\textsuperscript{22}

Furthermore, as the movement progressed, its organization was tightened and centralized for reasons of coordination and greater efficiency.\textsuperscript{23} As part of this process, Chiang's \textit{Outline of the New Life Movement} (\textit{Hsin sheng-huo yün-tung kang-yao}) and \textit{Necessary Knowledge of New Life} (\textit{Hsin sheng-huo hsiu-chih}) were published on May 15, 1934 in the major newspapers, to standardize its practise all over the country.\textsuperscript{24} More importantly, on July first, the Nanchang organization was converted into the Central New Life Promotion Association (\textit{Hsin sheng-huo yün-tung ts' u-chin tsung-hui}), with Chiang as chairman and Hsiung Shih-hui and Teng Wen-i—a leading member of the Blue Shirts—as vice chairmen. This body was to supervise and direct New Life activity over the country through a hierarchical organization reaching out from the center, through the provinces, all the way to the districts.\textsuperscript{25} Regional and local associations now became mere agencies for carrying out directives issued from the center. Moreover, the reorganization brought the movement more closely under the party and the government. The order for reorganization stipulated that provincial and municipal associations should be headed by the highest administrative officials of the area. They were to be aided by a committee of seven to nine men, consisting of representatives from the provincial government, provincial party organization, the Bureau of Civil Administration (\textit{min-cheng t'ing}), Bureau of Education, Bureau of Public Safety (\textit{hüng-an chu}), military organs in the locality, and law enforcement agencies (\textit{kung-fa tuan}).\textsuperscript{26}

The promotion associations were directorial and supervisory bodies. The actual work of conducting campaigns fell on the shoulder of permanent organizations such as the military police, the police, and the Boy Scouts. To aid these groups, “voluntary” Labor Service Corps (\textit{lao-tung fu-wu t'uan}) were established in the summer of 1934. The Kiangsi Youth Vacation Service Corps (\textit{Chiang-hsi ch'ing-nien chia-chi fu-wu t'uan}) came into being in June, followed in August by the Merchants' Service Membership (\textit{Shang-tien fu-wu yiian}), and the Women's Civil Servants Service Corps with Madame Chiang as director. The center closely regulated the activities of these groups, especially the youth corps, which were directly under the promotion associations.\textsuperscript{27} These regional organizations served as prototypes for national organizations like the New Life Movement Service Corps and the Women's New Life Service Corps, organized to enlist the nation's youth in a number of activities from construction to cooking.\textsuperscript{28}

The next major change came in December 1935, when it was decided to move the center to Nanking, the national capital, where Chiang spent most of his time now that the immediate crisis had been averted in Kiangsi and central China. On January 1, 1936 the headquarters were moved to an office in the Officers' Moral Endeavor Association and, after a few months, to more “commodious” quarters in

\textsuperscript{22} pao-kao, 290-362.
\textsuperscript{23} ibid., 118-119.
\textsuperscript{24} ibid., 121.
\textsuperscript{25} ibid., 139.
\textsuperscript{26} Article 3 of the "Outline of New Life Movement Organization in Provinces and Municipalities" (\textit{Ko sheng shih Hsin sheng-huo yün-tung ts' u-chin hui tsu-chih tsu-kang}), ibid., 140.
\textsuperscript{27} ibid., chart between pp. 244 and 245.
\textsuperscript{28} Chu, “The New Life Movement,” 7.
the First Public Garden. The national organization also underwent some changes. Representation in provincial and municipal committees was extended to finance and reconstruction departments, a possible manifestation of increasing awareness since 1935 of the necessity of attention to people's welfare for the success of the movement. In the same year, the center established closer control over the movement of the "weaker sex." On February 10, 1936 a committee was established to oversee women's movements; it was chaired by Madame Chiang, who came to control not only the women's movements but, by 1937, almost the entire New Life movement.

In spite of its auspicious beginnings and its organizational scope, the New Life Movement had lost much of its momentum by its second year. Whereas 1934, in particular the period immediately following the inauguration of the movement, witnessed a rapid expansion in the number of promotion associations in Kiangsi and elsewhere, by 1935 the gains had slowed down to a trickle, showing a significant increase only among overseas Chinese associations. The rot, however, had set in as early as 1934. The organizational expansion in that year concealed the sparseness of actual accomplishments and the feeling of "a general letdown . . . throughout the country." Chiang himself sounded pleased with the results of the first year when he reported that the "consciousness of 'discipline' and 'cleanliness' had become deeply engrained" among the people. His second anniversary speech—on February 19, 1936—revealed, however, that the accomplishments had been illusory, disappearing in the course of 1935. He noted more soberly:

Speaking from the point of results and practical conditions, we really cannot say that our expectations have been satisfied and that our original aim has been reached. On the contrary, it can almost be said that we have retreated rather than advanced. When we compare the results of this anniversary with that of the last one they do not tally. This is very sad and shameful. I have travelled over the country a great deal within the past year. Wherever I went, I have looked carefully for the actual results of our movement, to see if there is any difference in society and the life of the people, compared to the time before the movement was launched. I must say that, with very few exceptions, most places have not really accomplished the two objectives of cleanliness and orderliness. [Italics mine]

Notwithstanding the impression of activity and success created by the movement, at least in its first year, it accomplished little that was real and lasting even in its most rudimentary goals. In fact, so far as being a mass movement, its decline followed immediately upon the brief flurry of activities inspired by its inauguration. What kept it alive until the war with Japan started in 1937 was more the will of its leadership than the nurture of its achievements. After 1937, the movement lost its identity among a number of national salvation movements directed at the war effort. As the Kuomintang government retreated to Chungking in the interior, little

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30 MKESSNCKHSYHT, op. cit., 773. This was also evident in the establishment of the "People's Economic Reconstruction Movement" in April 1935 (Chu, 14) and the recruitment of the veteran social reformer missionary, George W. Shepherd, as an advisor for the movement later in the year. For Shepherd's activities, see Thomson, op. cit., chap. 8.
32 pao-hao, 234.
remained of the movement elsewhere but "weather-ruined and indecipherable" posters enjoining the populace to a more hygienic way of life. In Chungking itself, a modern cafeteria built in 1939 and the periodic ritual renewal of posters were testimonials to its persistence—but also to its irrelevance.\(^{34}\)

It is tempting to attribute the rapid and inglorious demise of the New Life Movement, as well as its failure to make an impression on Chinese society, to its apparently superficial concerns, which served more to bore than to inspire the population. Nevertheless, such an explanation obscures the leadership's reasons for choosing this particular approach, over a number of alternatives, to realize its goals. And it ignores altogether the seriousness of the leadership's efforts and intentions. Samuel Chu has described the movement as "unique because nothing comparable to its size, its organization, and its methods had ever been seen in China."\(^{35}\) Furthermore, the study of the movement's ideology indicates that hygienic reform, far from being a superficial concern, was an integral part of a comprehensive political outlook.

To a certain extent, the failure of the movement was organizational. The leadership intended the New Life associations to be vehicles for the revolutionary reorganization of society that it envisioned. Aside from popular mobilization, the movement was to assume the important task of reforming party and government officials. Yet, from the very start, the associations were intertwined with the existing political structure when they were placed under the control of party and government personnel. Moreover, organizational controls increased as the movement became more inflexible in its methods, augmenting the power of the existing hierarchy while completely annulling the possibility of public initiative. A movement that had purportedly been intended as a mass movement to educate the public—but, equally importantly, to reform those in power—quickly turned into a movement of those in power against the public. As central controls increased, the movement appeared more and more as a Kuomintang affair, with inevitable public skepticism about its professed goal of transcending partial political interests and about its spiritual purity.\(^{36}\) Furthermore, the monopoly of leadership positions by those whose imperfections were constant reminders of the Kuomintang's inability to deal with its own personnel could not but debilitate the movement and alienate the public.

Organizational weakness, however, does not explain why the leaders of the New Life Movement did not consider the alternative approach of bypassing the existing power structure by genuine popular mobilization through the New Life associations. The more comprehensive answer to the question lies in the intentions of the movement. To anticipate the conclusion to this study, the New Life Movement was intended not to challenge but to enhance the existing structure of authority. Its goal was not to extend political participation to the people but to mobilize them in support of state goals, to convert them into voluntary functionaries of a bureaucratic machinery that encompassed the whole nation. This administrative vision of politics rejected all conflict, violent or otherwise, as a method of politics. Occasional references to the need for independent-mindedness in the ideological writings of the movement were counteracted by more frequent expressions of disapproval for the New Culture Movement type of independent-mindedness, which was taken to be destructive. The New Life Movement was to engender a disciplined and "constructive" type of

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\(^{34}\) Graham Peck, *Two Kinds of Time* (Boston, 1967), 96.


independent-mindedness meant to contribute to the efficiency of the extant political structure, not to undermine it. Bypassing the government and the party, in short, would have led to consequences impermissible in the political ideology that guided the New Life Movement.

The explanation of China's political weakness in terms of its cultural degeneration was founded on the corresponding view that the behavior and commitment of individuals that made up the polity determined its strength. This basic assumption defined the issues involved in the New Life Movement. First, what was the nature of the "new citizen" that the movement expected to create? Secondly, what was to be the constitution of the regenerated culture that would serve as the foundation of polity? In particular, how was this culture related to contemporary civilization and to China's past? Was the New Life Movement indeed a conservative one, aiming to revive tradition? Finally, there is the question of the new political order that the leadership envisaged. The New Life Movement was informed by a basic understanding of politics and the relationship between politics and society that not only guided its methods but also defined its vision of good society.

Hygiene and Morality: The New Citizen of New Life

Chiang defined the content of the New Life Movement in his inaugural speech of February 1934 when he attributed China's inability to achieve equality with other nations to the inferiority of the "knowledge and morality" of her citizens to those of other countries.37 This entailed a number of specific deficiencies, material and spiritual, which he enumerated in his subsequent speeches. His criticisms were in turn picked up by other New Life leaders, who sometimes added their own views on the defects of the people but more often simply elaborated on Chiang's list or even repeated it verbatim. The resultant chorus of rebuke against the people by the leadership was one of the most ironic features of the movement.

The life of the Chinese at that time, according to Chiang, could be summarized in a few adjectives. Topping the list was "unbearable filthiness" (wu-sui) in every aspect of their lives. Next came "hedonism" (lang-man), which signified the unprincipled and uncontrolled pursuit of pleasure. Third was "laziness" (lan-tuo); they had no sense of the value of time, were careless, negligent, and irresponsible shirkers. Finally, they were "decrepit" (t'ui-t'ang), physically and spiritually. "To sum up in one word, the life of the average Chinese at the present is barbaric (yeh-man) and devoid of reason (pu-ho-li)."38 This, Chiang continued, could be seen in the way they lived. They ate like "cows, horses, pigs and sheep." Their clothes and homes were in utter disarray; they spat and urinated wherever they pleased. Having no principles, they smoked opium, gambled, and whored their lives away. When they walked, they looked half dead, with demeanor reminiscent of "zombies" (huo-szu-jen).39

Another author, elaborating on Chiang's points, described Chinese life as a life of "smoking," "sickness," "gambling," "filth," "ghosts" (i.e., superstition), and "indolence."40 Wang Ching-wei, concentrating on the psychological basis of such

37 Chiang, "yao-i," Pei, I, 5.
39 ibid., 23–24.
40 Lei Yu-t'ien, "Wang kuo sheng-huo ti ch'ing-suan," Pei, I, 80–86.
behavior, identified two fundamental characteristics of the Chinese people as lying at its root: "lackadaisicalness" or "sui-pienism" (sui-pien chu-i) and "self seekingness" (tsu-li chu-i). The first led to lives without a sense of right or wrong, and hence with no distinctions or purpose; lack of rules and sloppy behavior followed naturally from moral lassitude. "Self-seekingness," on the other hand, led to rejection of all outside interference with this kind of behavior as encroachment on "freedom." There was no consideration for others and their rights, only of one's own comfort; this selfishness inevitably obstructed social life and group solidarity.41

The New Life Movement aspired to purge every Chinese of these characteristics that weakened the nation and hindered its development. The two chief mottoes of the movement were "from the self to others" and "from the simple to the complex." That is, everyone would reform his or her self to become a model for others and also to watch over their behavior. Also, reform should start with the simplest and most basic aspects of life essential to its sustenance: "clothing, food, residence, and behavior" (i, shih, chu, hsing).42 The New Life Movement perceived the reform of these as prerequisite to every other reform in society: all else would be useless and ineffective unless these were changed first.43 The four items of "clothing, food, residence, and behavior" encompassed all aspects of everyday life: what people wore and how they wore it, what and how they ate, how they lived in their homes and what their homes looked like; behavior included both the specific and narrow sense of manner of walking and general public behavior.44

To leave no doubts about the improvements expected, Chiang wrote the Necessary Knowledge for New Life, an itemized compendium of New Life etiquette. This brief pamphlet and his Outline of the New Life Movement were must readings for everyone, being the "standard for [New Life Movement] work and explaining the whole of the movement."45 Under the headings of food, clothing, residence, and behavior, the pamphlet contained detailed instructions on what to do and what not to do. The heading "food" included cleanliness of food and eating utensils, the use of local products, and table manners, as well as avoidance of opium and drunkenness. Under "clothing" were: simplicity and neatness of dress, emphasis on utility, the use of national products, not going around naked, taking off one’s hat when going into closed spaces, etc. "Residence" included cleanliness of homes, simplicity of furniture, and frequent airing of houses, as well as the observance of national days by flags and a number of similar items. Finally, "behavior" referred to order in public, walking on the left side of the street, not spitting or urinating in public, respect for the national anthem, avoidance of gambling and prostitution, and so on.46

Underlying these specifics were principles of behavior that were to constitute the "public morality" (kung-te) of New Life, which was taken to be utterly lacking in Chinese society at that time.47 In his first speech Chiang mentioned four: "orderliness" (cheng-ch'i), "cleanliness" (ch'ing-chieh), "simplicity" (chien-tan), and "frugality" (p'u-ssu).48 In his later speeches, these were expanded to six by the addition of

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42 Chiang, "yao-i," Pei, I, 5.
43 Chiang, "Outline," in Chen, 224.
44 Ibid., 227.
45 pao-kao, 121.
46 Ibid., 137-138.
47 Tz'u Shih-ch'eng, Hain sheng-huo yu chiu she-hui (hereafter, chiu she-hui) (Nanking, 1935), 75.
“promptness” (hsun-ssu) and “precision” (ch’ieh-shih). At times, “harmoniousness” (ho-hsieh) and “dignity” (yen-su) were also included, making a total of eight such general standards. The basic thrust of all these norms was frequently summarized in the two most fundamental ones: “cleanliness” and “discipline” (kuei-chü), which constituted the first step in the achievement of “new life.”

According to Chiang, since the way of life reflected a people’s level of civilization as well as its moral, spiritual, and intellectual make-up, the achievement of these standards was a crucial task to any nation aspiring to be civilized. The lives of contemporary Westerners were governed by these standards. They also followed from the ethical principles that had formed the basis of Chinese morality and civilization in the past: “li, i, lien, ch’ih,” or propriety, righteousness, integrity, and sense of shame. Hence, to achieve them meant not only becoming modern but also reviving “native morality” (ku-yu tao-te).

The issue of the coincidence of behavioral modernization with the restoration of native values in the New Life conception will be taken up at length in the following section. The immediate question here is how the New Life leaders and advocates conceived of the relationship between external reform and inner cultivation. Specifically, were hygienic and behavioral improvement and spiritual regeneration independent processes or were they causally related? If the latter, which came first?

There are no clear-cut answers to these questions to be found in writings on the New Life Movement. Although there was agreement on some kind of relationship, New Life ideologues assigned priorities differently. Some dwelt exclusively on moral regeneration, with mere lip service to hygiene. In these instances, it is possible that the mention of hygiene was due more to prudent compliance with the desires of the leadership than to any genuine conviction in the efficacy or necessity of hygienic reform. The statements of the leadership were not free of ambiguities either. Chiang, in the Outline, described it as follows: “The New Life Movement aims at the promotion of a regular life guided by the four virtues (“li,” “i,” “lien,” “ch’ih”). These virtues must be applied to ordinary matter, such as food, clothing, shelter [sic], action. The four virtues are the essential principles for the promotion of morality. From these rules one learns how to deal with men and matters, how to cultivate oneself, and how to adjust oneself to surroundings. Whoever violates these rules is bound to fail; and a nation which neglects them will not survive.”

There is no doubt that in this passage, as well as in other theoretical statements by Chiang and others, the priority was given to the four ethical principles that guaranteed and guided proper behavior. This, however, contrasts with the actual practise of the movement, which was conducted solely in terms of hygienic and behavioral improvement, specifying the minutest aspects of the people’s behavior as if not to take a risk with their ethical capabilities. That hygienic and behavioral reform were taken as the precondition and the path to moral improvement is also obvious from their response when the movement was challenged by critics on the grounds of triviality. Going from the simple to the complex was one of the foremost

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50 Tz’u, chiu she-hui, 75.
51 Chiang, “Outline,” in Pei, I, 112. This was omitted in Mme. Chiang’s translation in Chen.
53 For an example see Liu Yung-yao, “Hsin sheng-huo yün-tung ti shih-tai shih-ming,” in Pei, I, 52–60.
slogans of the movement. What this implied is evident from the insistence that
clothing, food, residence, and behavior were the simplest aspects of life and that any
change that did not start with them was condemned to ineffectiveness.55 Commenting
on those who advocated the necessity of first “rectifying people’s hearts” (cheng
jen-hsin), one author noted that this was fine in principle but that there was no way
to realize it except to improve the practice of life: “If we want to change men’s
hearts, we must stress external training to mold good personalities; to reform their
everyday lives and nourish good habits. For example, a soldier, after receiving a long
training, cannot but manifest the spirit of a soldier in his actions.”56 The emphasis,
clearly, was on the methodological, if not the psychological, priority of hygienic and
behavioral transformation.

This is ultimately a moot question. Whatever the order of priorities in the minds
of the leadership, they made little distinction in practice between hygienic reform
and moral regeneration, regarding one simply as the manifestation of the other and
the achievement of one as the achievement of the other. The movement concerned
itself solely with cleanliness and orderly behavior, reacting to any criticism of its
methods with vigorous defense of the need to change basics. This attitude, however
noble the aims, reflected a narrow appreciation of morality, identifying it with
behavior and spirit conducive to order and cleanliness, which further meant obedience
to the leadership, who defined what was correct—and hence moral—behavior.

The “new citizen” of New Life was to be a composite of the various qualities
listed above. To leave no question as to what was expected of the citizenry, a series
(Hsin sheng-huo ts’ung-shu) addressed to the various occupations was published
between 1934 and 1936. The individual volumes in the series dealt both with the
general principles underlying the New Life Movement and with the particular duties
of various groups in achieving “new life” in accordance with the circumstances and
the social functions of their professions. The aim was to show them how not to
violate the principles of the movement, and how to contribute to it.57 In each case,
in addition to general principles, the group was told in very specific terms of its
present deficiencies and informed of expected improvements, as well as the ways of
achieving them. Taken together with other writings, these works yield a general
character prototype desired in the “new citizen.” Broadly, the new Chinese the
movement aspired to create would be healthy and rigorous in body and spirit,
socially and politically conscious and committed, forward-looking yet rooted in the
past.

“A healthy mind resides in a healthy body” was a basic principle of the move-
ment. Healthy bodies were not only the key to lively spirits but also, through the
latter, the first step in achieving national salvation. “In order to become a healthy
modern (hsien-tai) citizen, it is necessary first to have strong and robust bodies;
having a strong body [one] then has a strong spirit; having a strong spirit, [one]
can then acquire all the abilities to strengthen the nation; having all kinds of abilities
to strengthen the nation, [one] can naturally defend the state and glorify the nation,
help our state and nation to forever accord with the world and not again suffer from

55 Ibid., 229.
56 Ts’u, chiu she-hui, 50. For an extensive treat-
ment of the importance of physical reform, see Liu
Jui-heng, Hsin sheng-huo yu chien-k'ang (Nan-
king, 1934).
57 Editor’s preface to the series Hsin sheng-huo
ts’ung-shu.
the aggression and oppression of foreign countries or receive disdain and insults.\textsuperscript{58} Healthy bodies and spirits would lead to hard-working, self-sacrificing and self-confident citizens, willing to endure hardship and take risks in the cause of the nation.

The key to social and political consciousness was the cultivation of group orientation. In the eyes of New Life and Kuomintang leaders, Chinese were traditionally selfish. They thought only of themselves or of their families, with little awareness of or concern for the larger society and the nation.\textsuperscript{59} The cultivation of “group life” (t’uan-t’i sheng-huo) would contribute to national survival and strength by stimulating awareness of the nation and building up the spirit of responsibility and sacrifice: “How are ‘love of sincerity’ (ch’in-ai ching-ch’eng) and ‘sincere unification’ (ching-ch’eng t’uan-chieh) to be achieved? Naturally it is necessary to collectively bear responsibility that [we] can collectively go to the assistance of the nation in her difficulty; and [only if] we can collectively assist with the national difficulty can disaster be averted. Therefore, the most important thing is the people’s unity in thought and action. This is what we meant earlier by ‘unification in groups’ (t’uan-t’i-hua) and becoming disciplined (chi-liu-hua). These are what we call New Life.”\textsuperscript{60}

The most outstanding product of this emphasis were the Labor Service Corps, established with “the purpose of learning in order to benefit the world and relieve the people” (hsiieh wei chi shih, hsiieh wei chiu min).\textsuperscript{61}

The “politicization” (cheng-chih-hua) of the people and “awakening” (chüeh-hsing) of their consciousness was an acknowledged aim of the New Life Movement. Although critics denied its political significance,\textsuperscript{62} the leadership deemed the movement crucial to political mobilization. One described it as “a basic movement for political reform,” because it aimed to revolutionize the nation’s life.\textsuperscript{63} Others urged the people—the youth in particular—to shed their indifference to politics, study the political situation in China and the world, and actively participate in the reform movement.\textsuperscript{64} Chiang himself described it as a social movement which, as the condition of political change, was politically significant in its consequences.\textsuperscript{65} This was nevertheless an important distinction and expressed the leadership’s position on granting political roles to the people. Their understanding of political mobilization was increased awareness of the group, in order to subject one’s will to that of the collectivity—whatever its size and composition, from the family to the state. The emphasis was on self-restraint, self-sacrifice, obedience, loyalty. State interest was extended ad infinitum, while private interest was rejected as “selfishness.” This, of course, ruled out—by implication—any genuine political comment and action taken independently of the existing political structure and leadership, which were the focal points of obedience and loyalty. The Kuomintang leadership during the New Life Movement, as throughout the thirties, discouraged any dissonance from its policies.

\textsuperscript{58} Chiang, “Li-hsing Hsin sheng-huo,” in Pei, I, 18.
\textsuperscript{60} Wang Ching-wei, “Hsin sheng-huo ti chen i,” in Pei, I, 47.
\textsuperscript{61} pao-kao, 242.
\textsuperscript{62} See remarks to this effect by Hu Shih cited in Liu Shen-tung, Hsin sheng-huo yü kuo-min ching-chi (Nanking, 1935), 57–60.
\textsuperscript{63} Chang Yuan-jo, Hsin sheng-huo yü chung-chih kai-kao (Nanking, 1934), 45.
\textsuperscript{64} Li Hao-yü, “Hsien-tai Chung-kuo ch’ing-nien ti sheng-huo t’ai-tu,” in Pei, II, 35. Also see Shen Chao-yung, “Hsien-tai ch’ing-nien sheng-huo ti kai-tao wen-t’i,” in ibid., 69.
and looked askance at political advocacy independently initiated by the public or at variance with its own conception of what was necessary for China. "Self-restraint for the public good" and "unity of thought, speech, and action of all" meant in practice little more than conscientious performance of all functions and duties defined from above.

Finally, the "new citizen" was to be progressive without abandoning native roots. The old Chinese mentality was dominated by "backward-looking morality" (hui-ku ti tao-te), which made people resistant to change; they had to be made to realize the insufficiency of old ways and encouraged to aim forward and upward. But this was not to be equated with the superficial pursuit of what was fashionable or with the rejection of all that was old regardless of its value. It was necessary to filter native tradition through science to achieve a moral and contemporary life.

The education proposed for Chinese youth incorporated these three major features and their attendant behavioral manifestations. Reviewing the training of youth in developed and developing countries (such as the USSR, Italy, Turkey, Great Britain, France, U. S., Czechoslovakia, and Germany) and the needs of China, one author suggested the following ten guidelines: (1) training for national defense, or the acquisition of military skills, (2) spiritual reform to acquire the spirit of sacrifice, the ability to bear hardship and to pursue knowledge, (3) reform of character to eliminate dissipation and extravagance, (4) physical reform to acquire strong bodies, (5) intellectual reform to acquire useful learning, (6) belief in the san-min chu-i as the most suitable path for China, (7) aptitude for a good style of work by cultivating knowledge, creativity, and a cooperative attitude, (8) attention to ceremonies and usages, such as respectfulness when singing and listening to the national anthem, (9) discouragement of "individualism and familialism"—which were highly advanced in China—and teaching youth to put the group ahead of the individual, (10) willingness to take risks.

This was the most comprehensive list available in any of the writings of the New Life Movement, but the various items were taken up individually or in different combinations by most authors. Although they might have weighted them differently, I think it would be safe to say that most would have agreed on the necessity of these characteristics in the "new citizen" that the movement aimed to create.

Fu-ku and Fu-hsing: The Culture of New Life

The attributes of the "new citizen" and the whole content of the New Life Movement followed from its attitude toward the problem of change and the new culture it hoped to establish. The new culture intended for China, its relationship to contemporary civilization and to native traditions are some of the movement's most intriguing features.

While the leadership insisted from the beginning that the primary goal was to modernize China, it also stipulated that the new Chinese civilization was to be

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66 Wang, "Hsin sheng-huo ti chen i," Pei, I, 52.
67 Ch'en Li-fu, Hsin sheng-huo yü wei-sheng shih-kuam (Nanking, 1934), 1-2. Also see, Ho Chung-han, "Hsin sheng-huo yun-tung chih i-i," Pei, I, 35.
68 Editor's preface to Hsin sheng-huo ts'ung-shu.
erected upon a native moral foundation. The two were taken as mutually complementary: the modernization of life coincided with the revival of traditional morality that had fallen into disuse. The latter, it was believed, was timeless in its validity as the basis of civilized life and was identical to the morality underlying behavior in modernized societies of the West. If the traditional morality could be revivified to provide the guiding principles of life, China would easily reach the level of contemporary civilization without abandoning her native roots:

What are the manifestations of the level of knowledge and morality (chih-shih tao-te) of the common citizen; that is, of civilization and barbarism? Where are we to start improving the knowledge of the common citizen? This requires consideration of their basic life [style]; in other words, of the so-called "clothing, food, residence and behavior." These four basic items encompass the totality of everyday life, those things that one cannot do without for a moment. The spirit, thought, knowledge and morality of a man or of the citizens of a nation are all manifested in the way they conduct their lives. All those comrades in the audience who have been abroad know very well the way of foreigners with respect to clothing, food, residence and behavior; those who have not been abroad are familiar with them from contact with foreigners in the concessions, in missions or in the other places where they live. All the activities of foreigners, including the way they dress, eat, live and walk about are in complete accord with the demands of modern citizenship, displaying love for the state and loyalty to the nation. To sum it up, they are in total accordance with li, i, lien, ch‘ih.70

In other words, modern Western behavior was itself a manifestation of compliance with those virtues that had informed ancient Chinese civilization. In China, they had been lost with the "recent" decline of society.71 All the Chinese had to do in order to catch up with modern civilization was to recover them.

This belief in the essential unity of the bases of modern civilization and Chinese tradition endowed the cultural goals of the New Life Movement with an ambiguity, reflected in the conflicting interpretations by its critics and its sympathizers, of the movement's place in modern Chinese history.

To the critics, Chinese and Western, the movement was most conspicuous for its conservatism. Graham Peck described its modernizing aspects as a mere "facade," expressive of the wishes of a small Westernized elite and put up mainly for the benefit of foreigners.72 Native critics went even further and described the movement as a "restoration" (fu-ku), an integral part of the "conservative tendencies" of the thirties.73 These charges were justified by the leadership's insistence on the priority of the old virtues, along with the superficiality of its modernization. Kuomintang political attitudes in the thirties and the syncretic philosophy of the movement heightened the impression of conservatism. In 1931, the celebration of the birthday of Confucius was reinstituted, and there was a continuing attempt to revive Confucianism during the decade. Party and government leaders adopted as their political models the leaders of the T‘ung Chih Restoration of the 1860's. These men

70 Chiang, "yao-i," Pei, I, 5-6.
72 Peck, loc. cit.
73 Cited in Tz‘u, chiu she-hui, op. cit., 78. Also see Mary C. Wright, The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism (New York, 1966), 310-311, on this question.
had been prominent for their anti-rebellion activities and their belief in the sufficiency of the Confucian basis of the state, which had confined the value they placed on modern Western civilization to “superficial” techniques. The new synthesis the New Life Movement proposed was reminiscent of the t'i-yung formula suggested toward the last days of the Ch'ing Dynasty, premised on the possibility of welding together Chinese “substance” (t'i) with Western “functional” (yung) learning. Like their Confucian predecessors, New Life ideologues played down the importance of Western learning in the humanities and the social sciences, stressing “useful” learning—which consisted of science and technology. Finally, one avowed purpose of the New Life Movement was to counteract the pernicious effects of the wholesale attacks on Chinese tradition of the New Culture Movement of a decade earlier, accusing it of “destructiveness.” In the 1860’s, cultural syncretism had been a relatively progressive position. After the New Culture Movement, it appeared conservative, if not reactionary.

New Life Movement leaders and writers, however, adamantly protested against charges that the movement was restorationist or conservative. They perceived it as even more progressive than the New Culture Movement, which had been an “elite” movement in the tradition of past intellectual movements, making little impression on the people. It had failed, in particular, to touch the people’s lives and transform them. This was exactly what the New Life Movement expected to achieve by “revolutionizing” the national life. Their favorite metaphor for the movement was not “restoration” (fu-ku) but “revival” (fu-hsing). Fu-hsing has all the connotations of revitalization, rejuvenation, rebirth, renaissance (the Chinese term for the European “Renaissance” is fu-hsing); and it was employed in the movement in all these senses. Many took the movement as one of national rebirth or renaissance; one author used fu-hsing in conjunction with a more literal version of “rebirth,” tsai-sheng, to eliminate all ambiguity. These authors all hotly denied that “revival” implied “restoration.” First, they advocated not the reconstruction of old society but rather its underlying virtues. The extant social structure, if anything, impeded the realization of those virtues. The principles, on the other hand, had eternal validity: the genuine principles of social progress had no old or new, only right or wrong. The New Life Movement only intended to make the right principles the operative principles of Chinese life.

Neither its defenders' claims nor its critics' charge of “restorationism” does full justice to the nature of the New Life Movement. The former, restricting “modern” to the scope of individual public behavior and commitments, avoided the questions raised by the broader problems of modernization. They were thus able to smooth...
over possible contradictions between ancient virtues and the demands of modern society. For the same reason, they ignored the distinct possibility that the old virtues, reinterpreted into general principles of civilized society past and present, might lose much of their former sense, coming to serve new purposes. The critics, on the other hand, overlooked the movement's stress on modernization or, at best, minimized its significance because of its superficiality and the poverty of its achievements. Their charges of "restorationism," against attempts to keep alive traditional virtues, were quite plausible against the backdrop of the New Culture Movement. But they ignored the fact that the New Life Movement was itself a post-May Fourth phenomenon which, as a reaction to the cultural and social revolutions of the twenties, was in many ways shaped by the preoccupations and attitudes characteristic of that period. The vocabulary of cultural and social revolution infused the very language used in the movement for the translation of traditional ideas into contemporary usage. If the charges of restorationism were seemingly plausible, they still left the question of what was being restored. Restoration as a historical phenomenon has required a minimum commitment to political structures appropriate to the values to be perpetuated.81 Without the corresponding institutional structure, there is little guarantee that those values will retain their original sense as social norms or even serve the same purposes as before.

This, I submit, was the case with the New Life Movement. As its proponents guilelessly protested, the movement did not advocate a return to traditional social and political structures, and the society they envisioned had little to do with that of the conservative defenders of tradition in imperial China. It advocated neither the reestablishment of the bureaucratic monarchy nor the decentralized political arrangement of early Chinese history that had been so dear to conservative critics of the imperial government. Socially, it claimed to be revolutionary, launching a wholesale attack, if mostly verbal, on Chinese society:

[Whether the policies of a government can be successfully carried out depends greatly upon the customs and habits of the people at the time. When an old order collapses and a new order is about to rise, the new policies are frequently handicapped, if the new system does not base its foundation on the customs of the people. It is, therefore, necessary to start a movement first, to teach the people to adapt themselves to new conditions, before any ardent support for the new policies can be expected from the people. "Water always flows over a wet surface; while fire

81 This still leaves, of course, the question of what "minimum" implies. Robert Kann, in his The Problem of Restoration (Berkeley, 1968), defines restoration as "the reestablishment of a state of political and social affairs that was upset by previous revolutionary change" (3). In order for restoration to be successful, however, the restored system must incorporate some of the changes brought in by revolution. He nevertheless refuses to commit himself to the question of how much change the restored system can tolerate and still remain as a restoration, suggesting that the answer must be "pragmatic." If any one aspect is essential, it is "legal continuity" with the pre-revolutionary system (97). He rules out dictatorships that make instrumental use of the past as genuine restorations. In the case of the Kuomintang, it is clear that it did not seek continuity with imperial institutions or values. If anything was being restored, it was the values of the ancient past. In many ways, imperial institutions and values were regarded as perversions of those values. The Chinese term fn-hu, literally "reverting to the old," does include going back to the past, bypassing an intervening period no matter how long. This is different than Kann's more specific use of the term "restoration." But even then, the Kuomintang usage, unlike that of conservative Confucians in imperial China, did not imply the revival of the institutions of ancient China, and not even of the values, as they themselves were quick to point out.

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goes wherever it is dry." The function of any social movement is to prepare the wet surface for water and the dry place for fire. This accounts for the fact that every nation, during its period of transition, pays more attention to the change of customs and habits than to the new policies themselves.\textsuperscript{82}

In other words, it was the "customs and habits" of the people that accounted for the lack of "ardent support" for the new policies of the government and inhibited China's development into a new stage in her history. The New Life Movement was to accomplish the social change that was the prerequisite to genuine political change. Although the views of New Life ideologues ranged from the advocacy of as close an approximation of the past as was possible to its outright rejection,\textsuperscript{83} the majority were cultural syncretists who favored the combination of those features of Chinese and Western civilizations that suited the needs of the nation. As one author, more traditional than most in his conviction that a proper political order could be based only upon the correct ceremonial and music, put it, "That which can be used of Western ceremonial and music, adopt it; that which can be copied of ancient ceremonial and music, copy it."\textsuperscript{84} Things Western were acceptable even in the fundamentals of state and society. Even the most conservative of New Life writers did not advocate a return to the old value-institution complex but believed in the necessity of modernization (hsien-tai-hua). The movement was inspired by a preoccupation with inferiority to foreigners; it desired to make China equal to the West in civilization.\textsuperscript{85} The necessity of adapting to the environment was uniformly regarded as essential to survival. Where there was opposition to modern behavior, it was more to what the leadership considered its "crude," "degenerate," and "imitative" manifestations in China. As Wang Ching-wei expressed it, "modern" or hsien-tai, and even "à la mode" were desirable; what was objectionable was their Chinese counterpart, mo-ten.\textsuperscript{86} The goal of the movement was neither blind worship of the past nor aping of the West, but a synthesis of those aspects of either that would serve China's needs.\textsuperscript{87}

The necessity of change extended to morality as well. New Life advocates had a fluid, historicist view of morality that equated it with social "customs and habits" and evaluated its validity in terms of its contribution to social cohesion. This attitude contrasts sharply with Confucian moral fundamentalism, pointing to a notion of change that was the reverse of the regressive view of history that characterized the Confucian vision. "Time does not stand still and the environment changes with

\textsuperscript{82} Chiang, "Outline," in Chen, 223.

\textsuperscript{83} Hsiao Yu-mei, in his Yin-yüeh-che ti Hsin sheng-huo (Nanking, 1935), rejected the past altogether, noting that the price of preserving the past was becoming the laughing stock of all (91-92).

\textsuperscript{84} T'ang Hsiieh-yung, Hsin sheng-huo yü li-yüeh (Nanking, 1934), 68.

\textsuperscript{85} Chiang repeated this constantly. In one speech, he noted poignantly, "Foreigners are men, so are we; we can surely do what the foreigners are capable of doing. . . ." See "Hsin sheng-huo yün-tung chih chen i," in Chiang, Hsin sheng-huo yün-tung, op. cit., 69.


\textsuperscript{87} One author, noting the necessity of modernization, went on to say: "The party and national leaders who advocate the New Life Movement have also perceived this; therefore, they do not advocate the revival (hui-fu) of all the old teachings (li-chiao) or the old system but only stress the li, i, lien, chi'h, which are the basis of human life. They do not advocate that we imitate in toto the lives of Europeans and Americans but only instruct us to find out about their basic morality (chi-pan tao-te) such as preservation of order, love of cleanliness, emphasis on group and feeling of responsibility." Ch'en Heng-che, Hsin sheng-huo yü ju-nü chieh-fang (Nanking, 1934), 8.
Morality itself was subject to time: "New Life is advancing the old native morality but making it fit the conditions of the day, to reform and eliminate old habits of the past and to lead the people into a new life." Still another author stated more explicitly the social nature of morality and its fluidity. He emphasized that one of the basic purposes of the New Life Movement was to make the masses realize the insufficiency of old customs for the present and to transform the whole society. Morality was also a "social custom," "what is publicly accepted at the time." However, it was more basic than others; change in life customs had to take it as its motive force. In these statements and similar ones by other authors, morality was taken as the sum-total of social norms, posterior to social order. What guided choice of new norms, as times changed and the old norms became defunct, were considerations of national strength and progress: "Whatever meets social needs and is suitable to social development must be preserved and imitated."

These considerations were evident in the "native morality" to be revived to form the foundation of new Chinese life: "li, i, lien, ch'ih." It should be obvious from the very term "native morality" that New Life ideology took Chinese tradition as one, abolishing all distinctions between the conflicting currents of social philosophy that had coexisted in uneasy tension within the framework of a complex tradition. Their syncretism was appropriately reflected in the origin of the four principles singled out as representative of the traditional value system. The principles were first stated in the Kuan Tzu, a work attributed to the seventh-century B.C. statesman of that name in the state of Ch'i, who was responsible for the institution of policies that made Ch'i the foremost among the competing states of the time. Modern scholarship, however, has revealed a date considerably later—around 300 B.C.—and more than one author involved in its composition. The book contains ideas from all the major schools of thought at that time, Legalism being the dominant component with respect to social and economic policies. The Kuomintang choice implied a tacit acknowledgement that the revival of past values meant the revival, not of the dominant tradition of the past—Confucianism, but of some abstract quality that ran...
through all schools of social philosophy and somehow defined “Chineseness,” distinguishing the Chinese from all other cultures.

It would be misleading, however, to attribute this view of native values to the “romantic nationalism” of Kuomintang leaders. A closer look at the four principles and their interpretation in the New Life Movement shows that there was more involved in their choice than a romantic commitment to China’s past. The four principles were essentially little more than behavioral norms and hence perfectly suited to the flexibility that New Life moral relativism demanded. As norms of behavior, they were now to be filled with a new content. Chiang explained that though they had always been regarded as the foundations of the nation, they were to be reinterpreted to meet the requirements of “changing times and circumstances.” From the “pragmatic point of view” of China’s contemporary circumstances, their significance was as follows:

*Li* means regulated attitude, (mind as well as heart).

*i* means right conduct, (in all things).

*Lien* means clear discrimination, (honesty, in both personal, public and official life).

*Ch’ih* means real self-consciousness, (integrity and honour).

The word *li* means reason. It becomes natural law, when applied to nature; it becomes a rule, when applied to social affairs; and signifies discipline, when used in reference to national affairs. These three phases of one’s life are all regulated by reason. Therefore, *li* can be interpreted as regulated attitude of mind and heart.

The word *i* means proper. Any conduct which is in accordance with natural law, social rule, or national discipline must be considered as proper. When an act is not proper, or when one thinks it proper but does not act accordingly, the act is naturally not right and therefore cannot be called *i*.

The word *lien* means clear. It denotes distinction between right and wrong. What agrees with *li* and *i* is right, and what does not so agree is wrong. To take what we recognize as right and to forego what we recognize as wrong constitute clear discrimination. This is *lien*.

The word *ch’ih* means consciousness. When one is conscious of the fact that his own actions are not in accordance with *li*, *i*, and *lien*, he feels ashamed. When he is conscious of the fact that others are wrong, he feels disgusted. But the consciousness must be real and thorough so that he will strive to improve the good and endeavour to get rid of the evil. Then we call it *ch’ih*.

As defined in this passage, which was a standard explication of these virtues, the four principles were reinterpreted to accord with the need for disciplined behavior and commitment to national goals. They guaranteed proper conduct in “accordance with natural law, social rule, or national discipline.” “*Li, i, lien, ch’ih*” were both the “native morality” of China and also the “basic conditions of national unification.” The latter, however, was the ruling consideration. What was important was the contribution of the principles to “national unification” and the creation of citizens committed to group values. As Ch’en Li-fu defined the four principles, *li* was
discipline (chi-lü) in groups and politeness (li-mao) individually; i was the "spirit of organization," or feeling of responsibility; lien represented "division of labor," or "minding one's own business" (an-fen shou-chi); and ch'ih, public and individual morality (kung-te ssu-te).98

Of the four principles, the most important was li, meaning ceremonial or—more broadly—proper behavior.99 Li, a central concept of Confucianism, was not free of ambiguities. In the original Confucian conception, it was a reflection of inner cultivation, which was the basis of proper behavior; li without inner goodness was just the shadow of propriety without its substance.100 But li was also regarded as the basis of civilized behavior and was itself a civilizing force.101 Within Confucianism the two senses coexisted in a tension between inner cultivation and formal abidance by social rules, between the libertarian interpretation of Mencius (which made self-cultivation a matter of individual choice and responsibility) and the authoritarian interpretation of Hsün Tzu (who, having little faith in the ability of men to achieve goodness on their own, demanded the strict prescription of social norms as the key to social order and the preservation of society).102

The New Life approach to improving the people was much closer to Hsün Tzu's authoritarian interpretation—i.e., it stressed improvement through close regulation from the outside. Chiang's faith in the ability of the people, at least the Chinese people, to improve themselves was not much higher than that of Hsün Tzu. To him also, "knowing and not knowing li" was the difference between man and beast; it was the key to social life. The li were the most indispensable of all the principles, because Chinese people were incapable of group life. That is why Sun Yat-sen had written the Min-chüan ch'ü-pu, which was infused "with the spirit of li." The revolution would be completed when everyone acquired this spirit.103 Chiang's own pamphlet, Necessary Knowledge of New Life, was the movement's own Book of Rites, laying out in detail the code of behavior for the new Chinese society.

There is an obvious contradiction in this view identifying Chinese morality with the principles of social life and yet regarding China as having failed on precisely this count. How New Life writers explained this, and what the relationship of the movement to the various strands in Chinese tradition was, will be examined within the context of its political ideology. It would be useful here to briefly review some of the questions raised by the movement's claims of ties to China's past, and the synthesis between modern and native traditions that it advocated.

The New Life Movement was highly selective in regard to both native values to be revived and contemporary values of foreign origin to be emulated by the Chinese. What it selected of Chinese tradition as the essence of "native morality" were behavioral norms ensuring conscientious compliance with the requirements of one's place in society. The idea of place implied in the li had no doubt been a central

98 Ibid., 59–61.
100 Fung Yu-lan, A Short History of Chinese Philosophy, ed. by D. Bodde (New York, 1966), 42.
101 This was stressed by Hsün Tzu in particular. For the importance of the li in Hsün Tzu, see C. Chai and W. Chai, The Humanist Way in Ancient China: Essential Works of Confucianism (New York, 1965), 241–254.
organizing principle of Chinese society in the past; but, for the same reason, it was that very idea that was largely responsible for those features of Chinese society the movement objected to most: particularistic values that had interfered with consciousness of the polity, and the strict delimitation of roles that had discouraged participation in social and political affairs beyond what was deemed the appropriate sphere of each role. In short, the principles were originally designed to produce passive subjects through the application of social norms to regulate everyday life and ensure harmony or order.

However, as is evident in the picture of the “new citizen” offered above, passive subjects were the opposite of the citizenry the New Life Movement hoped to create through the revival of the old principles of social life: a progressive citizenry, absolutely committed to the nation, and constantly improving itself in order to enhance the strength and progress of the polity. This was the significance of Chiang’s reinterpretation which, purging the four principles of their traditional content, employed them to define roles and behavior in a new political space—the nation. What provided continuity between the traditional and the New Life interpretations of the principles were social discipline and the stress on compliance with group values. This, I think, also explains the apparent contradiction between the self-acknowledged moral relativism of the movement’s ideology and the often-expressed belief in the existence of eternally valid principles of social organization. It was the necessity of social discipline and order that was constant; the means of achieving order, on the other hand, were subject to change in accordance with “changing times and circumstances.”

With an instrumental interpretation of morality that identified the moral with behavior that met national and social needs, it should also be obvious why New Life leaders saw no contradiction between the revival of native values and modernization. The selection of both native values and behavioral standards of Western origin was guided by the same criterion of social discipline. Both—the one as an internalized sense of place, the other as its public manifestation—contributed to the same end and thus were mutually reinforcing. This is also why the reform of hygienic standards and formal behavior, seemingly superficial and trivial, occupied a place of such significance in the leadership’s eyes. The exclusively social interpretation of morality abolished the distinction between inner virtue and external appearance. As Chiang explicitly stated in the passage quoted at the beginning of this section, orderly behavior—in its manifestation of “love for the state and loyalty to the nation”—was incontrovertible proof of inner rectitude.

New Life ideologues simply ignored, or regarded as deviant, those aspects of both Chinese and modern Western civilizations that did not fit their conception of what constituted proper public morality. The connecting link between native and contemporary Western morality, as well as among the various currents of the Chinese past, was the New Life conception of society and its image of the ideal political order. This is what distinguished the Kuomintang effort in the thirties from earlier attempts at cultural synthesis. The principles underlying Kuomintang selectivity were based on political criteria that had not been a significant concern to the Confucian leaders of the nineteenth century. Where the latter were concerned mainly with propping up the institutional-ideological complex of the Confucian state with techniques borrowed from the West, the problem of the Kuomintang leadership was to
establish a political system where there was none. This overriding concern subsumed all other considerations, rendering them functional to that one purpose. To New Life ideologues, there existed no referent that was sacred and inviolable and of unquestioned validity, other than the national state. Their attitudes toward native values clearly indicate that what had constituted “substance” (t'i) to their Confucian predecessors was to them “function” (yung) in the service of their central concern. Most, including Chiang, had a fluid view of what constituted morality, measuring its validity in terms of its contribution to political strength—rather than the other way around, as had been the case in the Confucian scheme.

The New Life Movement was not a product of mere traditionalism; rather, it was the Chinese leadership’s answer to the cultural and social revolution that threatened the very structure of society. In other words, its conservatism was the conservatism of modern counterrevolution, not a simple reaffirmation of tradition. This was clearly stated in the leadership’s conception of ideal political order. With the nation-state as its own legitimizer, the total organization of society emerged as the solution to the problem of containing revolutionary social and political change.

Ancestral Hall and the Barrack: Politics and Society in New Life Thought

The New Life Movement was shaped by the interplay of two conflicting conceptions of politics, superimposed one upon the other. One conceived of politics as essentially a moral question. Such a view obviated the need for organization, focusing instead on the moral improvement of individuals as the means to good society. The other, opposite to the first, envisioned the ideal society as a bureaucratic machine with the one purpose of serving—as efficiently as possible—the cause of the state. Here, individuals were reduced to mere cogs, each with its own function to perform in the smooth operation of the machine; efficiency, rather than morality, was the highest value. The synthesis of these two views yielded a conception of politics in which individual moral improvement was the means to spontaneous and total organization of society, while the constant renewal of individuals was the key to the continued effectiveness of political institutions in an environment in endless flux.

It was this conception of politics, which underlay the cultural goals of the movement and determined its image of the “new citizen,” that marked the New Life Movement as a new phenomenon of Chinese politics. Individually, the two components of the movement’s ideology bore strong resemblances to the two major political traditions of the past—Confucianism and Legalism, in both premise and vocabulary. Yet their synthesis yielded a structure of politics basically different from the imperial political structure that had been a product of the fusion of those two schools. A discussion of the political ideas of the New Life Movement in the light of the basic ideas of Confucianism and Legalism indicates that the movement was fundamentally new in its assumptions concerning the relationship between state and society and, therefore, in the political organization it envisioned for the future.

The Confucian scheme took morality to be the central factor of politics. Political decay and political order were both contingent upon the moral qualities of the ruler: the sage-ruler achieved good government through self-cultivation. Morality itself, as the translation into politics of basic natural relationships, was the expression of a “natural” order, immutable and prior to politics. The political order based upon it
was the only proper order, its paradigm the family. The people themselves were not the subject of politics but the plastic material of the transforming power of the sage; they were to be educated, fed, and protected by political leaders informed by morality. Popular concern for politics emerged only in times of decline. Similarly, the pursuit of private interest was discouraged as deviation from proper concerns: it was disruptive of harmony and, therefore, improper. Nevertheless, Confucianism granted society a great deal of independence from the state, placing reliance for harmony primarily on the regulatory power of social norms (li). Furthermore, it actively tried to restrict the power of the state by the burden it placed on the ruler: moral cultivation was most crucial in the ruler, whose example determined the political condition. Rebellion was justified when the ruler failed in the performance of his duties and the preservation of harmony; such failure, by implication, pointed to the insufficiency of his morality. This view (curiously identified with democracy in Kuomintang thought, starting with Sun Yat-sen) provided a higher authority to which to appeal in the evaluation of the ruler’s performance in office.104

The Legalists rejected morality as an operative principle of politics and instead took the pursuit of self-interest by each and all as its empirical starting point. The most outstanding theoretician of the Legalist school, Han Fei Tzu, was a student of the authoritarian Confucian Hsün Tzu, who had based his advocacy of the strict enforcement of social norms on the premise of the natural selfishness of all living beings. Men, too, invariably put their private interests before all else; this inevitably brought them into conflict with one another over limited resources. The only solution under such circumstances was the minute regulation of duty and privilege through the li. Hsün Tzu nonetheless retained the ideal of the state based on morality; compulsion was necessary only when morality was absent. Legalists rejected morality altogether. As defenders of state power, they resisted all moral restrictions on the ruler’s power and regarded society as a tool for its maximization. They also rejected particular interests, though in their case it was because private pursuits inevitably encroached on the prerogatives of the state. Recognizing no morality other than interest and its condition—power, their stratagem for eliminating competition and conflict was the total organization of society. In contrast to Confucian reliance on social norms, politics in the Legalist scheme was reduced to the administration of power emanating from a single source—the state.105

The New Life statement contained aspects of both of these traditions. While the leadership’s explanations of political decay were couched in Confucian moral terms, its understanding of morality and its image of the ideal society brought its political philosophy much closer to that of the Legalists, though there too were basic differences.

New Life writers blamed China’s political crisis on the degeneration of “social customs and habits” and, by implication, moral decline. There was no consistent and uniform explanation of the origins of social and moral degeneration. In a few cases, 104 This résumé of Confucian political attitudes would not apply equally to all Confucians. The aspects stressed here are those characteristic of the Mencian interpretation of Confucius’ political philosophy.
105 H. G. Creel, Chinese Thought: From Confucius to Mao Tse-tung (New York, 1960), 125–131. It is difficult to agree with Prof. Creel’s description of the Legalists as “totalitarian,” except in a very broad sense of that term. Modern totalitarianism, I think, has a conception of the relationship between society and politics that the Legalists did not, and could not, have. For this distinction, see below.
it was ascribed to the blind aping of foreign ways; but this was not a widely shared attitude. Chiang, in contrast to his position in *China's Destiny* a few years later, regarded degeneration more as due to internal causes. In one of his earliest speeches, he criticized those who blamed China's circumstances on foreigners and pointed out the necessity of realizing that the Chinese themselves were responsible for what happened to China. This view was also the only explanation of decline on which there was anything close to a consensus. First suggested in Kuomintang ideology by Tai Chi-t'ao in his interpretation of Sunism, it held Taoism—the major philosophical alternative to Confucianism in Chinese tradition—responsible for the degeneration. Taoism, since the beginnings of the imperial period two thousand years ago, had insidiously captured the hearts even of those who claimed to be Confucians on the surface. Its individualistic and anti-social outlook on life had misled people away from concern for society, and accounted for the lack of social and national consciousness in China. To Kuomintang ideologues, concerned as they were with the individual roots of social fragmentation, Taoism provided a made-to-order explanation in terms of individual psychology.

The New Life Movement was purportedly premised on the centrality of individual morality to politics. The transformation of the behavior and attitudes of individuals was regarded as the primary task; institutional change was secondary because institutions were worth no more than the individuals operating them. Some went so far as to denigrate laws, on the grounds that they were secondary to morality, which was the foundation of society. Their favorite statement on political order was the passage in the *Great Learning* that showed—step by step—the achievement of peace in the world, starting with individual self-cultivation. Individual cultivation started with the leadership and the elite and, through their example, spread throughout the population. In his second lecture, Chiang—much in the manner of a Confucian sage, albeit an immodest one—offered himself as a model for emulation, bemoaning the fact that “in China presently there was but one Chiang Chieh-shih.” But, whereas in the past the sagehood of one leader might have been sufficient to reform the world, it was now necessary for one and all to become sages if political order was to be achieved.

Both the explanation of decay and the remedies suggested for it—the moral cultivation of the leadership and of the people—were good Confucian doctrine. To Chiang, the people were still as the grass that could not but bend when the sage’s virtue blew over them. If morality spread to the population through the example

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106 See, for example, Teng Hsüeh-p'ing, “Hsin sheng-huo yü-n-tung chih fa-tung ch'i chin-hsing,” in Pei, I, 63.
108 Tai Chi-t'ao, *Sun Wen chu-i chih che-hsueh ti ch'i-ch'u* (Canton, 1925), 47-49. Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, whose many concerns foreshadowed much of the political debate in twentieth century China, also blamed Taoism for China's weakness, although in his case the emphasis was on the passivity Taoism had engendered in Chinese society. See Chang Hao, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition in China, 1890-1907* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), esp. 87-89.
112 Chiang, “Yao-i,” in Pei, I, 2. The original of this statement was in the *Analects*, No. 12:19: “The virtue of the gentleman may be compared to the wind and that of the commoner to the weeds. The weeds under the force of the wind cannot but bend.” Wm. Theodore de Bary (ed.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York, 1964), 33.
of the leadership, all of China's problems, rooted in selfishness (or "self-seekingness," li-chi chu-i), would come to an end. New Life authors attacked all expressions of particular interest as contrary to moral behavior. Both individualism and class warfare were manifestations of moral failure. If morality could be reestablished, class oppression would end and so would class struggle, because each would come to consider the good of the other and all would put the interest of the nation above their own interests. Capital and Labor, if they abided by the four principles, would terminate their conflict; and misguided peasants would stop following the Communists.\textsuperscript{115}

This, however, is where the agreement between Confucianism and New Life ideology ended. In spite of their common political outlook linking politics to individual morality, New Life ideology broke with Confucianism in its understanding of both politics and morality and, consequently, of the relationship between the two. New Life ideology rejected the idea of social-political order as an immutable, natural order. The state alone was permanent; social and political relations were historical, functions of changing state needs. It followed that morality was neither the limit nor the end but the instrument of the state. In Confucian political theory, the state derived its legitimacy from the ruler's morality, demonstrated through his ability to establish conditions of harmony that would enable the people to realize their potential for virtue and pursue their natural and social obligations. This criterion provided Confucian society with a political conscience that was lacking in New Life ideology. Unlike the Confucian state which, as the expression of morality, was subject to judgment on the grounds of inner conscience, morality in New Life ideology was instrumental, existing only to serve the ends of the state. In the Kuomintang version, national interest was the only criterion to distinguish the moral from the immoral: that which contributed to state power was moral, that which did not, immoral. Morality, therefore, had a shifting content, adapting to ever-changing circumstances with that one end in view. Also, morality—as the instrument of national ends—served an essentially different function in society than it did in the Confucian scheme. The latter had rested moral responsibility with the ruler, employing it to restrict the power of the state. New Life ideology placed the burden of proof on the population: it was the people who were expected to prove their worthiness to their rulers. From this perspective, obedience—not conscience—was the highest possible virtue.

The notion of morality as disciplined compliance with the dictates of the group abolished the "inner space" of the individual and was more suitable to the cog in the machine than to either the conscientious Confucian or the politically conscious modern citizen. Appropriately, the ideal political order in New Life vision was expressed in the metaphor of the machine. The image of society as a machine was itself ever present. Ch'en Li-fu posited "efficiency" as the central goal of political organization; the complexity of New Life organization was itself justified in terms of greater "efficiency" in achieving its goals.\textsuperscript{116} One author explicitly suggested that the ideal social organization would be analogous to a machine in which each part performed its assigned function with witless precision, ensuring the smooth opera-

\textsuperscript{115} Liu, Hsin sheng-huo yu kuo-min ching-chi, op. cit., 56–57; and Fan Yuan-sheng, Nung-min ti Hsin sheng-huo (Nanking, 1934), 55–57.

\textsuperscript{116} Ch'en Li-fu, op. cit., 22–23. Also, pao-kao, 115–119.
tion of the whole. The li, the central behavioral principle of the movement, gained its significance from the mechanical regularity with which it endowed social processes. The Hsin sheng-huo yin-tung ts'ung-shu reflected this same conception of society in terms of mechanically related functional units. Each of the various occupational groupings it addressed had a specific function in society and would do its part in the movement in accordance with that function.

The paradigm of the ideal society implicit in this metaphor was the bureaucracy. What the New Life Movement desired was a thorough bureaucratization of society, with each individual having a specific function to perform in order to achieve the goals of the organization. The values the movement tried to instill in the people confirmed this wish: its functional morality; its hierarchical conception of society; the stress on uniformity assured by specific rules, on regularity and order, and on the necessity of obedience to the dictates of the collectivity personified in superiors—all this reinforced the image of society as a bureaucratic machine. Not surprisingly, the leadership ultimately identified its good society with the social organization that approached this image most closely—the military. The inspiration for this may have been provided by the “militarism” of Chiang and his military colleagues; but it was certainly implicit in the political ideas of most New Life ideologues, and many openly acknowledged it. Its implication was certainly much more profound than military interference in politics or military leadership; what it envisioned was the replication of military organization in society.

“Militarization (chün-shih-hua), along with “productivization” (sheng-ch’an-hua) and “aestheticization” (i-shu-hua), was the ultimate change the New Life Movement aimed to bring about in Chinese life. On some occasions, “rationalization” (ho-li-hua), “scientificization” (k’o-hsüeh-hua), “disciplinization” (chi-lü-hua), and “unification in group” (t’uan-chich-hua) were also included; but it was the first three that formed the core. Of those, the most fundamental was “militarization.” Chiang proposed it as the ultimate goal in his first speech, and reaffirmed its centrality in a later one when he asserted that another name for the New Life Movement was “Militarization Movement.”

Chu P’ei-te, writing for officers, suggested that the norms (kuei-lü) of the movement differed little from military rules of discipline (chi-lü, a term also used for rules in the movement); he went on to quote from military works and regulations to prove his point. Soldiers, he concluded, were the most suitable models for the population.

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117 If our everyday lives are thoroughly trained and methodically organized, there will be no motion not corresponding to rules, just like the operation of a machine,” quoted in Ch’en, Hsin sheng-huo yü hsin-li chien-she, op. cit., 24.

118 T’ang, Hsin sheng-huo yü li yüeh, op. cit., 16-17.

119 The metaphor of the machine and the idea of efficiency were also important among the advocates of organization as the solution to political problems in Europe. The aim of efficiency was “to create a special environment which will induce the individual to make the best decision—and ‘best’ in this context, means a decision most helpful to the needs and ends of the organization.” S. Wolin, Politics and Vision (Boston, 1960), 410.

120 It is quite possible, as Lloyd Eastman suggests, that the Blue Shirt Organization provided the paradigm for the New Life Movement initially. The Blue Shirts, in their active commitment to national and organizational goals, were but a military organization operating with maximum and conscious efficiency. For the relationship between the Blue Shirts and the NLM, spiritual and organizational, see Eastman, “Fascism in Kuomintang China: the Blue Shirts,” The China Quarterly, No. 49 (January-March 1972), pp. 1-31.


123 Chu P’ei-te, Chün-kuan ti Hsin sheng-huo (Nanking, 1934), 6-11.
The content of "militarization, productivization and aestheticization" included the basic issues of the New Life Movement:

Militarization for the civil servants included respect for the national and Kuomintang flags, obedience to superiors, the wearing of uniforms, promptness, and acquiring the habit of taking cold baths. For teachers and students, it also included obedience and the wearing of uniforms. In addition, they were to receive military training, participate in athletics, and to forego smoking, drinking, and dancing. Militarization for the ordinary citizen between the ages of sixteen and forty consisted of simple military training, air-raid and first-aid training, respect for the law and the development of the habits of regularity and cleanliness. The productive mode of life was to be attained by reducing unnecessary expenditures, including elaborate weddings and funerals, by the development of the habit of saving, by acquiring a spirit of cooperation, by utilizing all available time, including leisure hours, by using only native-made goods, and by learning to respect public property. The cultural mode of life was to be attained by being direct and temperate in speech, friendly in attitude, thoughtful and energetic in action, constantly improving in study, and patriotic and self-reliant in belief. Toward others, the cultural mode of life was to mean fair treatment and helpful aid toward friends, and respectful, but not blind obedience toward leaders and superiors. This mode of life manifested in work was to include the willing giving of oneself in voluntary service with no thought of reward, and the breaking of superstition wherever found.124

Military training and attitudes were the key to each of the above. At another place, Chiang held the separation of civil and military training as one of the chief reasons for China's weakness.125 The final result of militarization was to be "uniformity" (cheng-ch'i hua-i), to ensure that each and every citizen "protect the race and defend the nation."126 The ideal of "militarization" overwhelmed the moralistic component of New Life political ideology by reducing morality to that of the parade ground, to conscientious vigilance to keep in step to the tune of marching music.

This political goal suggests that the New Life Movement was much more akin to the spirit underlying Legalism (with its urge to total organization of society)

126 Ibid., 26. The New Life conception of politics was informed by what Michael Walzer has called the "military view of the political world." See The Revolution of the Saints (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 277. As in the case of the protestant radicals, the primacy given by New Life ideology to the extensive organization of society implicit in the "military view" derived ultimately from the rejection of the naturalness of political order and a simultaneous, and related, commitment to reform, (ibid., 4–11). In this fundamental sense, New Life ideology parted ways with traditional Chinese political conceptions, and justified its claims to being revolutionary, even though in its case it was the nation-state rather than a transcendent God that provided the authority for political action. The analogy, however, must not be carried too far. What was conspicuously absent in New Life ideology was the notion of systemic change: a "utopian," in Mannheim's sense, challenge to the existing order. (Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, New York: Harvest Books, 192–204) The nation-state, hypostatized, could have sanctioned the transformation of the socio-political structure. The Kuomintang, while it employed the nation-state as the source of its legitimacy, identified it with the existing order. As a result, its claims to revolution devolved into mere justification for the defense of the status quo and the intensification of its control over society. Even its vision of political reorganization on the military model was used to strengthen the existing order, not to replace it with another. The goal of the movement was to suppress revolution and bolster the status quo of which the Kuomintang was an inextricable component. Its vision, though it had revolutionary implications, did not offer the potential for revolutionary action that Walzer ascribes to radical protestant ideology but did serve the cause of counterrevolution.
than to Confucianism (which tried to limit the scope of the state). Like the Legalists, the leaders of the movement conceived of political order as the administration of centralized power. Nevertheless, the Kuomintang premise was fundamentally different from that of the Legalists; and so was the proposed organization in its extent and nature. The Legalist advocacy of organization was based on the assumption of inevitable and irreconcilable conflict of interest between the ruler and the ruled. Organization, therefore, was meant to bridge the gap between the political leadership and society. It was designed primarily to serve the absolute will of the ruler by rendering society harmless, and pliable in the interest of the state. The organization the Kuomintang aimed at was modern totalitarian in its conception and scope. As a modern political conception, it eliminated the divergence of interest between state and society on the premise that the state was but the expression of collective interest and the will of society. As a totalitarian vision, it interpreted this to mean that the state, as the unchallengeable personification of collective unity, encompassed society wholly within it. This not only ruled out disagreement with state policies but also demanded (in contrast to the Legalist attitude, which sought to secure passive submission) active and activist participation in policies issued from the center and voluntary effort to augment state power.

Indeed, the movement discovered inspiration in modern totalitarianism. In his inaugural speech, Chiang extolled Germany for her resurgence since World War I, attributing it to the discipline and loyalty of her citizens. Contemporary Germany and Italy remained as standards for the movement in China, frequently mentioned by its ideologues. But these were not the only examples. It was possible even to praise the archenemy, the Soviet Union, when its achievements corresponded to what the New Life Movement hoped to accomplish. In each case, the determining criterion of choice was the strength and efficiency born of commitment to the nation and disciplined service in its causes.

Conclusion

The political assumptions underlying the New Life Movement integrated its various aspects, conditioning its cultural attitudes and shaping the "new citizen" it aspired to create. Its political orientation provided the guiding principle of its cultural syncretism. The content of the movement, trivial outside this framework, was highly appropriate when viewed from this perspective. The idea of politics as a replica of military organization lay at the root of the emphasis on "cleanliness" and "order," as well as of the organizational characteristics of the movement. The image of the new Chinese as "soldier-citizen" followed logically from this same assumption.

The political ideology of the New Life Movement was not traditional but was born in response to the cultural and social revolutions of the twenties and thirties. The movement owed its very conception to the need to suppress the social revolutionary activities of the Communists. Likewise, its ideologues frequently attacked—for its "destructiveness"—the New Culture Movement, which had advocated the total transformation of traditional culture in the name of individual liberation. Its reaction to revolution, however, does not necessarily identify it as conservative. The move-

127 Chiang, "yao-i," in Pei, I, 4.
128 Shen, Ko kuo ch'ing-men hsün-lien yü Hsin-sheng-huo yün-tung, op. cit.
ment adopted the language of those it opposed, at the same time as it tried to under-

ment adopted the language of those it opposed, at the same time as it tried to under-
cut their revolutionary appeal. While it rejected the demands of revolutionaries, it
did not simultaneously reject the idea of revolution or advocate the preservation of
old society. Its own claim to popular support was based on being more, not less,
revolutionary than its opponents; and its conservative vocabulary served to justify
revolution, not to reaffirm the validity of traditional values.129

This ambivalence toward revolution was more characteristic of modern counter-
revolution than of anti-revolutionary conservatism. The movement was against both
individualism and class conflict, the two basic new forces in Chinese politics.
Individualism was the basic issue of the New Culture Movement, class struggle the
means advocated by the Communists to achieve social transformation. New Life
objections to these were grounded in the view that they were expressions of selfish
interests. While individualism was concerned only with individual benefit, class
struggle represented the same for larger groups; both, however, were reprehensible
as subversive of national interest and unity. The movement itself bore the impeccable
credentials of its time in its premise of individual and social transformation as pre-
requisites of political change; but it perceived these in qualitatively different ways
from its opponents. The goal of individual transformation, in contrast to New
Culture demands for individual liberation, was to subject the individual to the group.
Likewise, the vocabulary of social revolution only served to justify the suppression
of demands for revolutionary social change. New Life leadership expressed the con-


129 Yü Wen-wei, “Hsin sheng-huo yün-tung,” in
Pei, I, 72–74. This is a frequently encountered
claim. Many NLM writers regarded the movement
as the latest stage in China’s modernization, rather
than as one that would counteract earlier changes.

The claim was based on this movement being more
fundamental than all the others, as it aimed to
change people’s very lives. See Ch’en, Hsin sheng-

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suppressing newly emerging social forces. These conflicting goals cancelled one another out, leaving the movement with the most trivial of its goals, which were more conspicuous for their tediousness than for their capacity to arouse the population. The ultimate intention of the movement had been to totally organize society. Given its lack of success in arousing the people, its one alternative was to employ organizational power to enforce its will. As the discussion of New Life organization at the beginning of this study indicates, the movement had an unprecedentedly extensive organization, but one that was subjected to the very political structure it was expected to reform. This relationship condemned it to immobility. As Samuel Chu has noted, the movement completely failed to appeal to the people; and it proved incapable of asserting itself by force, to coerce the population into the new organizational structure it envisioned.

There was much in the New Life Movement that was reminiscent of mass movements initiated by the Chinese Communist Party before and after 1949. The most pronounced resemblance concerned the relationship of individual behavior to society and polity. Despite crucial differences in premises and methods arising from broader underlying differences in social and political philosophy, the New Life Movement hoped to create a new Chinese bearing many of the attributes of the ideal Communist in the literature of the sixties: physically rigorous, brave, progressive and creative, independent-minded yet disciplined—all out of selfless devotion to society. And in both instances, the military man—totally dedicated to voluntaristic action in the service of organizational goals—provided the paradigm of the good citizen.

Such coincidence was not fortuitous. As New Life ideology indicates, Kuomintang leaders—no less than the Communists—deemed greater political integration necessary to national survival in the contemporary world, and recognized the necessity of involving the population in the political process if that goal was to be achieved. They realized that effective government in the twentieth century required more than the restoration of order; it also demanded of the state the ability to serve as the agent of change, to transform society in the direction of greater national cohesion and unity of purpose. The New Life Movement represented the Kuomintang effort to mobilize society to this end. It shared with Communist-led mass movements the goal of fashioning a citizenry responsive to national needs, willing to endure hardship for the good of society, and ready to exert the maximum effort for the achievement of national progress.

The resemblance, however, ends there. Underlying these common goals were diametrically opposite conceptions of change, which distinguished the New Life Movement from Communist movements in its methods. Communist policies were based on the premise that class struggle—or, in a more generalized sense, social conflict—was the motive force of social change, and social transformation the foundation of political change. This premise made political analysis and consequent political action sensitive to shifts in the configuration of social forces. By contrast New Life ideology was wanting in social theory, and projected an overly simple view of social relations. It completely ignored the complex of social interests and loyalties that composed the individual or, at the least, intervened between the individual and the state. It rejected, as signs of selfishness or insufficient moral development, all loyalties and interests that did not contribute to state power. Consequently, while the Com-
munists have linked individual improvement to social and political transformation, the Kuomintang substituted the reform of individuals for all structural change. The dominant Communist view embodied in Mao Tse-tung's thought has conceived the relationship between individual improvement and social change as a dialectical one, with changes in one dependent upon—and, in their turn, determinative of—changes in the other, a conception consistent with the Marxist view of man as "the ensemble of social relations." Even those movements seemingly focusing on the individual rather than the social-political structure, such as the Proletarian Cultural Revolution, have approached the problem of the individual as a social problem, as the reflection in the individual mind of the struggle between social tendencies. The Kuomintang, on the other hand, isolated individuals, or at least the "social customs and habits" that conditioned individual behavior, from the social structure. In the Party's view, since political decline was a consequence of individual degeneration, the improvement of individuals was sufficient to reform the social-political structure. The result was the total neglect of structural change.

This political outlook, born out of abhorrence for social conflict, denied conflict any role whatsoever in social change, viewing it only as a further manifestation of moral decline. The inevitable clash of interests incumbent upon the extension of economic and political power to larger segments of society ruled out the possibility of Kuomintang support for popular demands. On the contrary, the Kuomintang tried to avert conflict by persuading all members of society that the greatest contribution they could make to China's progress, and hence to themselves, was the conscientious performance of their individual functions in society. This, I think, was the practical political significance of the New Life perception of political order and political change in terms of the dynamics of individual improvement which not only obviated the need for structural change but also offered the promise of "social demobilization" without political alienation.

The centrality of the individual in the Kuomintang conception of politics generated a disdain for questions of popular welfare; this was one of the greatest weaknesses of the New Life Movement, and a basic factor in its inability to reach the population. There was a degree of naive presumption in the leadership's expectation that it could play Pied Piper to the Chinese population on the strength of its declaration of its own virtue. Ultimately, its relegation of material improvement—where it related to livelihood—to the superstructure of life was tied in with its social and political ideas, which were derivative of its basic intention to avert revolutionary social transformation. It is a moot question whether Chinese society and economy could have been improved in the thirties without fundamental changes in the socio-economic structure. The fact remains that the Kuomintang government wagered on the strong, the social and economic elite, as the basis of its power. Those who tried to improve people's lives through reformist methods were frequently driven to despair by the obstruction of their efforts by the existing social structure and the political backing it received from the authorities. Kuomintang lack of success with the population contrasts sharply with the Communist success in the early thirties and

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130 Quoted in Donald Munro, "The Malleability of Man in Chinese Marxism," The China Quarterly, No. 48 (October-December 1971), 609-640, 611. Mao's relevant ideas are most cogently expressed in the essay "On Practice" and in its 1963 supplement, "Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?" 131 Thomson, passim.
once again during the war. Whatever the conditions of rural mobilization and the occasional changes in Communist tactics, it is evident that it was their sustained ability to improve the people's livelihood, as well as their involvement of the people in social change, that was to a great extent responsible for the hold they came to have over the population. The people, mobilized in the revolutionary transformation of their own lives, were much more responsive to Communist guidance, even in the cause of "cleanliness" and "discipline," than they were to the Kuomintang.

Contemporary observers of the New Life Movement were quick to note this deficiency of the movement. Most critics concurred in the desirability of hygienic and behavioral reform, but questioned its sufficiency to reach higher goals such as national regeneration. Hu Shih, whose criticisms were often singled out for attack by New Life writers, was one of the foremost representatives of this position. He argued that while hygienic and behavioral improvement were good aims, they could achieve no more than just that. National regeneration required the acquisition of higher learning. In an article expressing approval of "new life," he nevertheless subtly shifted the meaning of that phrase, defining it as a "meaningful life" (yú i-szu ti sheng-huo), the essence of which was constantly asking "why" — an attitude more in the spirit of the earlier New Culture Movement than that of the New Life Movement, which put a premium on obedience to authority. He also stressed the necessity of social reform along with individual improvement, arguing that since the individual was a product of society, emphasizing the one and ignoring the other would only result in failure. Other writers stressed social and economic reform even further. Given the poverty of China and the suffering of the people, they pointed out, it was meaningless to talk of hygienic and moral reform. Injunctions on frugality made little sense to a population that lacked even the basic necessities of life. Defenders of the movement responded to the first type of criticism with pieties on the necessity of starting from the simplest aspects of life to proceed to the more complex; higher learning might be good for people like Hu Shih, but most were too ignorant and deprived to even think about that. Contradictorily, those who insisted on material improvement were told that spiritual life was at least as important as material, especially in China, and that was what the New Life Movement aimed at. Such criticism, however, had a telling effect, as the failure of the movement forced itself on the consciousness of its leaders. Its impact was officially conceded when the People's Economic Reconstruction Movement was established in April 1935, as a supplement to the New Life Movement. But it remained sec-

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132 This has been documented extensively by now. See, for instance, Mark Selden, The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972). Chalmers A. Johnson, in his Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power (Stanford, 1967), also provides impressive evidence of Communist responsiveness to the needs of the rural population. Although these authors differ considerably in their premises of the conditions of peasant mobilization, they both provide a sharp contrast between the Communist ability and the Kuomintang inability to deal with the problems of rural China.

133 Criticisms of the movement were extremely rare. Few at the time dared to criticize the movement openly. Hu Shih was one of the most outspoken critics. Chu, "The New Life Movement," 10. For this particular criticism, see Chang, Hsin sheng-huo yu cheng-chih kai-ko, 18, 19.


136 Referred to in Fan, Nung-min ti Hsin sheng-huo, op. cit., 20–24.


ondary and, in the absence of genuine social and political change, largely ineffective, failing to succor the movement.\textsuperscript{139}

Lloyd Eastman has recently suggested that the New Life Movement was one manifestation of a general tendency toward Fascism in the Kuomintang in the 1930's.\textsuperscript{140} The analysis of the political intent and goals of the movement here supports Eastman's view. The movement bore a strong resemblance to European movements described by the generic term Fascist, both in its counterrevolutionary stance and in its designs for the total mobilization of society in the service of the state.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to extend the resemblance to the mass mobilization methods employed in the New Life Movement. Kuomintang emphasis was on control, not on the unrestrained release of popular energies against internal and external "enemies." Consequently, it was unwilling to provide a cathartic outlet for popular dissatisfaction by manipulating grievances into a force of aggression. Even readily available targets were not sufficiently exploited. The government scrupulously tried to curb expressions of hostility against Japan, then engaged in aggression against China, even after it became clear that this was leading to disenchantment with the movement, especially among the youth. The Communists, though their elimination was an explicit objective of the movement, were treated more as a manifestation of general moral degeneration than as the cause of deterioration of the body politic. The ideology of the movement was similarly lacking in the tone of hostility or myth-making that permeates Fascist and National Socialist writings. Such self-restraint was possibly the consequence of the government's fear of undermining its own foundations by an unbridled mass movement; unlike its European analogues, the New Life Movement was initiated not by a radical right movement trying to gain access to power but by the government itself. The attitude, I think, is also indicative of military wariness of social tension, even in the pursuit of its own goals.

The New Life Movement was motivated by a single-minded preoccupation with the deficiencies of the Chinese people. In this sense, the people were the most conspicuous target of the movement. On the other hand, the movement's failure lay in its inability to offer the population anything beyond cleanliness in return for their effort and for their voluntary submission to a government that was uncertain of its own legitimacy. The Kuomintang was unable, as the Communists were, to promise the people the amelioration of their existence. Nor was it able, like the European Fascist movements with which it shared a great deal in common, to offer the people scapegoats with which to explain the miseries of that existence. Its hopes to mobilize popular energies in favor of the state ultimately foundered on its fear of the loss of control over those energies.

\textit{Bibliographical Note}

Secondary literature on the New Life Movement is extremely sparse, both in English and in Chinese, indicating a lack of interest among scholars toward the movement. It consists mostly of a few short articles or incidental references in larger studies of the period. The more important ones are referred to in the essay.

This study was based primarily on two sets of materials. The organizational aspects of the movement are covered through the two annual reports published by the Central New Life Promotion Association, \textit{Min kuo erh-shih-szu nien Hsin sheng-huo yin-tung tsung pao-kao} and \textit{Min-kuo erh shih-szu nien ch'uan kuo Hsin sheng-huo yin-tung}. These two volumes contain detailed information on organization, per-

\textsuperscript{139} Chu, "The New Life Movement," \textit{14}.

\textsuperscript{140} Eastman, \textit{op. cit.}
sonnel, policy decisions, correspondence between the central and regional associations, and yearly reviews of New Life work in each area. In addition, the second annual report contains reprints of all the important articles published by the official New Life organ, the *Hsin sheng-huo yün-tung ts'u-chin tsung-hui-k'ăn*.

For the movement’s ideology, the study relies extensively on the *Hsin sheng-huo ts'ung-shu*. This series, published by the Cheng Chung Book Co., was edited by Yeh Ch’u-ts’ang, Chief Secretary of the Standing Committee of the Central Executive Committee of the Kuomintang, a member of the Political Council, and director of the Publicity Department of the Central Party Headquarters (Who’s Who in China, 1936). The series—contributed to by many high party, military, and government officials—represents the most extensive expression of the official ideology of the movement. It was originally planned in forty volumes—mostly directed at all the occupations in Chinese society, from the military to entertainers. The second annual report, published at the end of 1936, however, lists thirty-two titles. The Hoover Institute East Asia Library holds twenty-six of these titles (and the most important ones, including general treatises and the more strategic occupations). These form the core of this study. They were supplemented with the collection by Pei Ching-hua, *Hsin sheng-huo lun-t'ung*, in two volumes. The first volume contains important speeches and writings by the leaders and supporters of the movement, the second, mainly those of outstanding Chinese intellectuals. While these are mostly in favor of the movement, in many cases the approval is at best cursory and its emphases subtly different from those of the leadership. A small minority of the essays even contain implicit criticisms of the attitude of the movement toward the problems of Chinese society.